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son is not, after all, the most important determinant in all the tendencies and forces that are at work in human life, and in this way becomes the highest category for morals as it is for metaphysics and philosophy in general.

J. G. JAMES.

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SOME THOUGHTS UNDERLYING GEORGE MEREDITH'S POEMS.

Laggard fame, having overtaken Meredith the novelist, may be expected in time to come up with Meredith the poet; the critics, when they have estimated *The Egotist*, will consider *The Empty Purse*. It is true that Mr. George Trevelyan and Mr. James Moffat are now directing attention to the poetical works. But it is only quite recently that such guides have been available, and meanwhile the majority of admirers of George Meredith's poems have stumbled on them tardily, by way of the novels, and been surprised to find that they contained the more explicit statement of their author's meaning.

Forty years ago, in a memorable letter to *The Spectator*, Swinburne replied to that paper's adverse criticism of *Modern Love* with the assertion,—“A more perfect piece of writing no man alive has ever turned out than the sonnet beginning,—‘We saw the swallows gathering in the sky.’” In 1862, when Tennyson and Browning were at the height of their fame, this was a bold challenge, but the poem justifies the championship. It is composed of fifty stanzas of sixteen lines each, the whole forming a complete design, and telling the tale of two bound in an unhappy marriage. The story, in some respects is difficult to follow, connectives are missing, and it is not always easy to discriminate between the speakers. Yet from the outset two things are clear to the reader. First, that Meredith conceives of tragedy as something subtle and diffused, not discoverable in violence of action or expression, the suicide at the close of the poem being emotionally insignificant in comparison with changes that have taken place beneath a controlled and

conventional exterior; second, that we are confronted with a writer whose generalizations are as vivid and pictorial as his instances. The humblest writer in attempting to reveal his convictions to other minds, realizes that in proportion as he penetrates caverns and recesses of thought he must set torches of metaphor to light the obscurity of unaccustomed paths. With Meredith the pathway is aflame; his metaphor is so vivid, so constant, as to seem the thought itself. In stanzas one to four of "Modern Love" the poet relates the experiences of the husband and wife; their awakening to consciousness of alienation succeeded by action and reaction of feeling, the man's exhausted vengefulness giving way to lethargy that "apes the magnanimity of love." In the fourth stanza the experience is universalized and Meredith speaks directly:—

"All other joys of life he strove to warm,
And magnify, and catch them to his lip:
But they had suffered shipwreck with the ship,
And gazed upon him sallow from the storm.
Or if delusion came, 'twas but to show
The coming minute mock the one that went.
Cold as a mountain in its star pitched tent
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe:
Whom self-caged Passion, from its prison bars,
Is always watching with a wondering hate.
Not till the fire is dying in the grate,
Look we for any kinship with the stars.
Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth—
We have it only when we are half earth.
Little avails that coinage to the old."

So definite and exact is the rendering of moods and experience in the forty-six remaining "sonnets" that, at their close, the reader finds phrase after phrase etched as with acid on the plate of memory. Throughout, the poem is distinguished by greatness of metaphor, sustained and exalted till in the final quatrain perhaps its highest significance is reached:—

"In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that faint thin line upon the shore."

A careful consideration of the criticism Mr. Swinburne challenged leads inevitably to the conclusion that it was in fact not the style but the subject of "Modern Love" to which the reviewers took exception. And this attitude Meredith appears to have foreseen when he prefaced the first edition of the poem with the words,

"This is not meat
For little people or for fools."

He was aware that both the classes he somewhat ungraciously indicated would find cause for complaint, the narrow-minded scenting danger in the ground work of the story, the unintelligent in whom "the senses still usurp the station of their issue mind," misapprehending the whole matter. Here, as elsewhere, Meredith treats of the elemental passions, but he is concerned with their complex expressions, their subtler issues, selecting emotional situations at the only point at which they are capable of intellectual consideration, where,

"Change is on the wing to bud
Rose in brain from rose in blood."

With "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth," published in 1883, we pass at once to the Nature Poetry which we have been told is, with "Modern Love," Meredith's peculiar contribution to literature. The term, in connection with Meredith, is meaningless. His ideal of the conditions of effective thought is best expressed in his own words:—

"Not solitarily in fields we find
Earth's secret open, though one page is there:
Her plainest such as children spell and share
With bird and beast, raised letters for the blind.
Not where the troubled passions toss the mind,
In turbid cities can the key be bare.
It hangs for those who hither thither fare,
Close interthreading nature with our kind."

On a merely superficial reading this would appear a sufficient warning against such classification of Meredith's work, and to those who in any degree have penetrated his teaching there must be something ludicrous in the idea of division in that which,

from first to last, is a revelation of the unity between earth and man,—“her chief expression, her great word of life.” Before this volume appeared “The Egoist” and “The Tragic Comedians” had been written and Meredith had mercilessly analysed much that is commonly termed love and showed it merely to be projection of self at a new angle, a seeking of the first person in the second. It was therefore unlikely that when he came to speak of feeling for nature he would, in himself or others, confuse an obscure transcendentalism with the love born of fearless and intimate knowledge. The song of the lark ascending shall indeed penetrate,—

“To her beyond the handmaid ear
Who sits beside our inner springs”

but the promise is to him whose outward ear is surrendered to the sweetness

“And you shall hear the herb and tree,
The better heart of men shall see
Shall feel celestially, as long
As you crave nothing but the song.”

and that is the keynote of this volume of 1883, which contains “Earth and Man” and “The Woods of Westernmain.”

A recent number of *The Hibbert Journal* contained an article entitled “Mr. Meredith on Religion,” in which after discussing Meredith’s utterances in respect of Nature, Death and Prayer, Mr. Moffat concludes thus an estimate of his attitude towards the question of personal immortality. “Here he is putting his readers off with a mist of colored, gleaming words; for beyond the bar which he summons the soul thus cheerily to cross, it is doubtful if any Pilot is to be met face to face, and more than doubtful if any haven lies for what men learn upon these shores of time and space to prize above all price.” This surely, is the strangest misconception. It may indeed be true, as Mr. Moffat suggests earlier, that by a kind of negative emphasis arising from his horror of individualism, Meredith at times is betrayed into an undue disparagement of the human personality. With a defence of his position we are not here concerned, but what that position is he has made abundantly

clear. We are, he urges, to "read Earth" to learn the lesson of the woodland where,—

"The pine tree drops its dead;
They are quiet as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of a tree,
Even we
Even so."

The interdependence of life and death he tells us, is manifest. No veil is over the face of the mother, a film in on the eyes of the child, and when the senses cease to cloud his intellect man will discern that the antithesis of natural and spiritual has been of his own making. The law of the transience of human individuality was set forth in "The Spirit of Earth in Autumn," published in 1862, and it lies at the very root of the "Poems and Lyrics" of 1883. In view of Meredith's subsequent publications it is difficult to imagine how Mr. Moffat's doubt, if genuine doubt it be, can have arisen, but, as Meredith is not a person to give meaningless titles, he would have done well to inquire why this collection is "Poems and Lyrics of the *Joy* of Earth?" The volume opens with a description of the magic forest of Westermain. Its entrance is scored with the feet of those who fly from the experience of life, but the traveller who penetrates to its core finds that his intellect is strengthened till he is able to face fear, and, tracking terror to its lair, he finds that the monster of his panic was but a lurid projection of his mind. The Allegory of "Westermain" is followed by these verses,—

"Last night returning from my twilight walk
I met the gray mist Death, whose eyeless brow
Was bent on me, and from his hand of chalk
He reached me flowers as from a withered bough:
O Death, what bitter nose-gays givest thou!

Death said, I gather, and pursued his way—
Another stood by me, a shape in stone,
Sword-hacked and iron-stained, with breasts of clay,
And metal veins that sometimes fiery shone:
O Life, how naked and how hard when known!

Life said, As thou hast carved me, such am I.
Then memory like the nightjar on the pine,
And sightless hope, a woodlark in night sky,
Joined notes of Death and Life till night's decline:
Of Death, of Life those inwound notes are mine."

It is upon this granite basis of hard-won experience, this abiding consciousness of the "inwound" realities of death and life that Meredith's optimism is reared. He has refused to retain anything that moth and rust can corrupt, but in discarding Hope he has disburdened himself of Fear. His Daughter of Hades has but one day on earth but she spends it in joy and not in complaining and Melampus, moving in love and humility amid the life of the woods sees beyond strife the issue of strife, "beholds in fulfillment the unfulfilled." It is through the fearless questionings embodied in "Westermain" and "Earth and Man" that the conclusion given in the last three lines of "My Theme" the sonnet at the end of the volume, has been gained,—

"I say that this love of earth reveals
A soul beside our own to quicken, quell,
Irradiate, and through ruinous floods uplift."

"Ruinous floods" is one of the phrases that might have put Mr. Moffat on his guard, but he leads up to the closing words we have quoted from his article by remarking that if Meredith's attitude towards the belief in, and the desire for personal immortality, be of the nature he has seemed to suggest, "the general heart will be up in protest." It is difficult to regard with gravity a statement in which the inherent order of events is so completely neglected. This particular argument, if applied by their contemporaries to Galileo or Harvey or Darwin, would have been as apposite. In season and out of season, in poems of almost unmatched beauty like "The Hymn to Colour" and the "Thrush in February," in philosophical disquisitions like "A Faith on Trial," "Youth in Memory" and "The Ode to the Comic Spirit," Meredith has spent his life in assailing that which he fully realizes is regarded by his fellows as the stronghold of their faith. Against nothing less impregnable would such giant warfare have been sustained. In verse, at least, it is difficult to imagine a more direct and exhaustive treatment of the question Mr. Moffat has raised than that contained in "A Faith on Trial," a long poem in the volume entitled "A Reading of

Earth," published in 1888. A position which more dramatically stated it may be possible to misunderstand is here set forth explicitly. From a room where death hangs over his wife, the poet on a brilliant May morning passes into the open air. The sight of beech leaves shimmering in the sun recalls his imagination to the land of his wife's birth—the days they spent together in Normandy. The sense of contrast between the security of the past and the terror of the present darkens the whole aspect of earth. Buds gleam silver against a background of yew, thrushes and blackbirds are singing, but to the ears of the mourner gladness is ribald. But this sentimental mood is short-lived, the writer of *Westermarck* must walk to observe, not to project his own feelings or fancies. He recognizes that his nerves are prompting him to sin against knowledge, for in calmer days he found in Nature the face of a mother where he sees now "a visage of hags." Thinking thus of the present and the past he stands before a wild cherry in bloom. For years this tree has been the lovers' herald of spring, their image and symbol of immortality. It is radiant as ever and its mere beauty enlightens the darkness of the beholder, but today it seems to portend some revelation, and the poet pauses before it in anticipation of a fuller vision and a deeper insight. As he waits, a company of children carrying wreaths and a May-pole come round the corner of his garden. He willingly pays his toll and dismisses them with the recognition that this morning their minds are more attuned to the purposes of nature than his own. When they have gone, his attitude is altered from rebellion to passive acceptance of the blow Death is about to deal, and "patience, mortal of peace." The children's shouts continue to ring in his ears and he contrasts their merriment with his questioning. The mortal in himself has been shrinking from mortality, pleading with Earth for some sign of individual life after death and his pleading has proved "mere breath, breath on a buckler of steel." Legends and fictions are not avenues to her heart, the only road to that is the real, the only method of increasing insight is accepting facts. The senses must be disciplined to travel the highway of realities before heights of thought can be scaled. Man must for-

sake his man-made fictions before he can accept such comfort as the truth can afford :—

“Cry we for permanence fast;
Permanence hangs by the grave;
Sits on the grave green-grassed,
On the roll of the heaved grave-mound.”

Death and life are one, and man in his submission to a common destiny must learn to recognize his links with the past and the future. Earth, the life-giver, gathers each generation to her breast in order that the next may have being. Reason is man's ultimate guide but only when his fear of death is overcome and he is content to fall out of life quietly as the leaves and fir cones fall, will she issue out of confusion and take her due place. Earth's secrets can be read only by those who have secured control of the nerves that shrink from her processes. In man's infancy legends were serviceable, but the time has come for his theories to be rooted in fact. He is called on to realize the futility of his search for permanence in any object of the material world. In past ages he was instructed to cut the cables of lust, but he has remained bound to his flesh by cords of craving, and the longing for individual immortality is one of these cords. Now he is called upon to cut loose from the finer as well as the grosser strands of his desire and when he has seemed thus to cut himself adrift, for the first time he will find anchorage. For his beliefs will embrace and not contradict the facts. He

“The battle the loss and the ache
Will for pledge of vitality know.”

Finally in considering Mr. Moffat's exposition it is impossible to escape from the conclusion that his imagery of the Pilot and the Bar, his talk of “the things men learn upon those shores of time and space to prize above all price” is singularly out of taste. To use a metaphor which has been accepted as an almost final expression of a definite faith, in connection with one who strives to dispel that faith, is scarcely less irreverent to the mysteries and sublimities of the creed that is called in question than it is alien to the matter in hand.

In poetical quality "The Empty Purse" is not among the foremost of Meredith's creations, yet it is of importance as summing up and applying the ideas which have been suggested as underlying much of his earlier work. At the beginning of the poem, a youth reduced to the condition of the prodigal in the Bible story, is found seated on a wayside bank. The past, out of which the present predicament has arisen, is reviewed. A pampered babyhood with a title to docility based on the speed with which the child's screams ceased when his wants were supplied has been succeeded by a season of passion when, in virtue of his wealth, the world appeared as a feast outspread for his appetite. Any help he might have received from the laws of the multitude was denied to him, for in early days the suggestion "Not thou as commoner men" had been whispered in his ear. To Meredith an assumption of superiority to one's fellows appears the most pernicious of poisons, and much pains is spent in demonstrating to the prodigal that the homage which served to foster this belief was not paid to him but to his well-stored purse. In addressing the youth the poet paints his story in colors that are lurid, yet with a faithfulness to fact that he is forced to acknowledge. Having done this, he turns to reveal the truth of the present situation. This poverty, this nakedness, he says, is in reality no disaster, but rather the young man's golden opportunity and his first chance in life. The sole wealth earth has to offer lies in knowledge won from experience, and all this time his money has been keeping him a prisoner, holding him back from this birth-right.

"But now from his cavernous hold,
Free may thy soul be set,
As a child of the Death and the Life, to learn,
Refreshed by some bodily sweat,
The meaning of either in turn,
What issue may come of the two:—
A morn beyond mornings, beyond all reach
Of emotional arms at the stretch to unfold:
A firmament passing our visible blue."

Thus far we recognize the familiar creed of the writer who everywhere destroys sentiment to reveal reality—the fundamental belief of the novelist who produced "The Egoist" and

"The Story of Lady Camper and General Ople." A man must see himself divested of all false and adventitious aids and recognize exactly the nature of the raw material with which he works, before he can begin to weave the fabric of a life. In early days the shuttle may seem to cross and recross at a furious pace, but until a pattern has been chosen and the threads selected and controlled to some determined end there will be no issue upon the loom. The possibilities of self-deception are unlimited. Sir Willowby Patterne can swear eternal devotion while he is unable to commit himself to an exact hour for an appointment the next morning, and, in Meredith's view, of such unreality, such confusion between sentiment and emotion, every man may be guilty in his unregenerate youth. For Egotism is to Meredith what Original Sin was to our forefathers, an initial condition common to all and only to be outgrown by much prayer and fasting. It is his habit to correlate apparently separated issues under this head, and to focus attention on this root evil rather than the branch problems of our social life. In the main he chooses rather to communicate a principle than to demonstrate its special applications. But "The Empty Purse" contains more than a variation of his ancient theme of the necessity of self-knowledge and self-discipline. It is constructive and begins where the tales of the Egoist and General Ople are ended. With this prodigal, painful experience is to flower in thought and bear fruit in action, and the nature of the thought and the quality of the action are clearly indicated. But if the old instinct of competitive self-seeking be obliterated and the hope of heaven and fear of hell removed, what stimulus shall urge men to effort? We imagine an answer that is bloodless and vague; Meredith responds with a battle-cry:—

*"Keep the young generations in hail
And bequeath them no tumbled house."*

The power of preserving and perpetuating the medium of thought—the chalice of spirit—to Meredith this is eternal life, this is immortality in fact and in deed. His secret has been uttered, the riddle of conflict has been read, a meaning found in which the crooked becomes straight and rough places plain:—

"There hast thou the sacred theme,
 Therein the inveterate spur
 Of the Innermost. See her one blink
 In vision past eyeballs—Not thee
 She cares for, but us. Follow her—
 Follow her and thou wilt not sink.
 With thy soul the life espouse:
 This life of the visible, audible, ring
 With thy love tight about and no death will be;
 The name be an empty thing
 And woe a forgotten old trick:
 And battle will come as a challenge to drink:
 As a warrior's wound each transient sting,
 She leads to the uppermost link by link;
 Exacts but vision, desires not vows.
 Above us the singular number to see;
 The plural warm round us; ourself in the thick,
 A dot or a stop: that is our task;
 Her lesson in figured arithmetic,
 For the letters of Life behind its mask,
 Her flower-like look under fearful brows."

But, and here lies the immediate point of the poem, this larger altruistic vision involves a complete readjustment of our present social and economic arrangements. These, as they exist, belong to a non-spiritual past, to the childhood of the race when might and not right prevailed. This youth who, before his birth, was condemned to disaster by parental stupidity is called on to testify against the mistake from which he has suffered. But the error is deep-rooted and will not be easy to eradicate, for its displacement involves readjusted activities and new valuations. Hitherto the most idealistic of men have supposed that money should be one item at least, of their children's inheritance. As yet they fail to realize that wealth sufficient in degree to prevent youth from finding its true level, rubbing shoulder to shoulder with men "by necessity urged," is not only unjust to the world at large but is also destructive of the special interests they are attempting to protect:—

"Ask what crown
 Comes of our tides of the blood at war,
 For man to bequeath generations down!
 And ask what thou wast when the Purse was brimmed:
 What high-sounding ball for the Gods at play:
 A conservative youth who the cream-bowl skimmed
 Desiring affairs to be left as they are."

Unless the power of enjoyment be sustained it is futile to hand on objects to be enjoyed, and the faculty of enjoyment is dependent on keenness and alertness of mind. Some kind of effort is essential to its continuance, and purposeful effort must be founded on a knowledge of the realities of existence. Money obtained without work cloaks these realities and prevents its possessor from "striking earth," that is, grounding his effort, and consequently his sense of relative values, on the actualities of nature and human life. But neither here, nor anywhere else, is Meredith an exponent of asceticism. He appeals in virtue of "feasting to come." He points out that increased brotherhood and community of feeling is incompatible with a desire for the kind of wealth which, because its supply is limited, must be competitively obtained. Men have confused pleasures and luxuries till they have come to think of them as identical. But the sources of pleasure are in fact common and inexhaustible and when these are preferred to luxuries and excitements money will assume its real, and comparatively elementary, significance:—

"When our Earth we have seen and have linked
With the home of the spirit to whom we unfold,
Imprisoned humanity, open will throw
Its fortress gates, and rivers of gold
For the congregate friendliness flow."

That day will bring to mankind delights and revelations now unimagined and unimaginable. Meanwhile Meredith urges on the individual the need of a closer contact with the hearts of his fellows and a deeper intimacy with the processes of nature:—

"Yield into harness thy best and thy worst;
Away on the trot of thy servitude start,
Through the rigors and joys and sustainments of air.
I promise not more save that feasting will come
To a mind and a body no longer inverted:
The sense of large charity over the land,
Earth's wheaten of wisdom dispensed in the rough,
And a bell ringing thanks for a sustenance meal
Through the active machine: lean fare,
But it carries a sparkle!

"Our season of drought is reminder rude:—
 No later than yesternoon,
 I looked on the horse of a cart,
 By the wayside water trough.
 How at every draught of his bride of thirst
 His nostrils widened! The sight was good:
 Food for us, food, such as first
 Drew our thoughts to earth's lowly for food."

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MATTHEW ARNOLD ON THE "POWERS" OF LIFE.

If we wish to know what interests ethical philosophers most, I suppose we can find a clue in the badges and party-names they wear. Hedonism, "teleological energism," "ethical idealism," these, which are taken as marking parties, are the names of opinions about what is the largest good conceivable, or about the nature of good. Determinism, indeterminism—these are names of opinions about the sense in which we are free to pursue or reject the good at all. If we examine the contents of contemporary volumes on ethics, the emphasis of such names will not surprise us. The questions whether "ought" can be reduced to "is," whether "ought" is super-personal, how the "ought" of logic and æsthetics is related to that of ethics; again, "pleasure, duty and the good"—especially pleasure, eternal focus for the refining intellects of psychology, metaphysics and the theory of knowledge—take up a generous space in the books and, as we soon perceive, in the moralists' minds. Now the factitious problem of "free will," though it is admirably calculated to sharpen the analytic instrument of the human mind, and to afford a field for those temperamental impulses that play so great a part in philosophy, has for morals probably no importance whatever. And though this is not quite true of the nature of obligation and the good, yet it is almost true. As a student of these things I was not wholly taken aback when a well-kown English philosopher dropped the remark, "Of course ethics has nothing to say about what we are to do."